

Knowing of your interest in foreign affairs, I wanted to discuss our nation's important mission in Afghanistan. You have probably heard that violence has recently increased and that the Taliban and al Qaeda sympathizers are gaining ground in their efforts to reestablish a terrorist sanctuary in that country. There's no question that the United States and allied troops on the ground, along with Afghanistan's new pro-U.S. government, are facing serious challenges. These challenges include a flourishing opium poppy cultivation that threatens to destabilize reforms in the country and helps fund Taliban insurgents. And even worse, it is clear that tribal leaders in the rogue western region of Pakistan are providing terrorists a safe haven to train and plot attacks in Afghanistan and beyond.



Concerning the latter, U.S. intelligence leaders have recently urged Pakistan to allow increased U.S. operations in its ungoverned western region. Although reports suggest that Pakistan's new government has not agreed to all of our requests, recent strikes against al Qaeda and Taliban forces by U.S. unmanned Predator drones suggest that we have greater access to target key terrorists who are living in that region. Pakistan has helped detain some high-ranking al Qaeda leaders, including the mastermind of 9/11, Khalid Sheikh Mohammad, but their support for our efforts has been uneven. They must do more to work hand-in-hand with our nation to develop an effective policy against terrorists who seek safe harbor within its borders.

Image Source: <http://www.state.gov/p/sca/ci/>

Meanwhile, U.S. [Secretary of Defense Robert Gates](#) recently suggested that our nation plans to commit additional troops in Afghanistan to combat Taliban insurgents and terrorists. As the decision-making process develops, I will continue to support the recommendations of our commanders on the ground. Importantly, [General David Petraeus](#), who is widely credited for implementing the successful counter-insurgency strategy in Iraq, this

fall will become the commander of

[U.S. Central Command](#)

, which oversees U.S. military operations in Afghanistan and neighboring countries. I have the utmost confidence in General Petraeus' ability to develop an effective strategy to bolster security and political stability in Afghanistan.

In closing, I strongly believe our nation's mission in Afghanistan is critical to U.S. security interests in the region. As you probably recall, it was the Taliban that provided al Qaeda with a terrorist sanctuary in Afghanistan before the September 11 terrorist attacks. Our nation led a broad coalition effort to liberate Afghanistan from their rule shortly thereafter, and a pro-U.S. government subsequently came to power through democratic elections. Afghanistan's transformation has made it more difficult for al Qaeda and like-minded terrorists to plot and execute additional attacks on our soil, and we are clearly safer because of it. It is very important that coalition forces build on this progress by repelling the Taliban's efforts to destabilize Afghanistan's new government and regain power. For this reason, I will continue to work in Congress to ensure that our troops have the tools and resources they need to successfully prosecute their mission and bolster our security.